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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D C. 20548

CIVIL DIVISION

JUL 29 1969

Mr. Edward P. Cliff
Chief, Forest Service
Department of Agriculture

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Dear Mr. Cliff:

This is in reference to our draft report to the Congress on the review of the administration of recreation fees under the provisions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, and the comments thereon from Mr. E. W. Schultz, Acting Chief, Forest Service, dated December 18, 1968.

We appreciate the comments which we received on the draft report and note that the Forest Service is in agreement with our suggestions that (1) visitors be responsible for obtaining recreation permits, and (2) there should be strict enforcement of the regulations concerning the payment of fees.

In Mr. Schultz' letter it was stated that although the Forest Service believed the criteria used for designating fee areas were adequate, refinement of the criteria was a continuing process and there had been much refinement since 1966. The letter pointed out, however, that there had been changes in the system of establishing user fees each year since its inception and that it was believed that facing yet another change in 1970, it would seem capricious to hastily implement a change in 1969 which would jeopardize the hard-won public acceptance which was just beginning to make the system work.

In view of the fact that the regulations for the current recreation year have been in effect since April 1, 1969, and that under the provisions of Public Law 90-401, approved July 15, 1968, the individual agencies will be responsible for the establishment of admission and user fees effective March 31, 1970, we believe that certain of our suggestions pertaining to fee regulations for the recreation year beginning April 1, 1969, are no longer appropriate. Accordingly, we do not plan to issue the report to the Congress.

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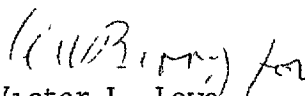
However, as noted in the draft report, our review showed that user fees were charged at only one of the 416 recreation sites in one Forest Service region which we visited, and this charge had been instituted at the suggestion of a Washington representative of the Forest Service. During our visit to that region, we found that seven other sites contained facilities that might have justified charging user fees. It is possible that recreation sites in other regions not visited may also contain facilities that might justify establishment of user fees. Since the responsibility for establishing admission and user fees will rest with the cognizant agency after March 31, 1970, the Forest Service may wish to review its user fee practices to ensure that applicable fees are collected when authorized by law.

Executive Order 11200 recognized the desirability of establishing uniform practices among the Federal agencies regarding recreation user fees and related matters. However, during the period in which the Order has been in effect, it is apparent that such uniformity has not always been achieved. For instance, at the time of our review, we were advised by a Recreation Branch Chief of the Forest Service that visitors questioned the need to pay fees at designated sites of the Coronado National Forest because visitors are not required to pay fees at the Saguaro National Monument which is adjacent to the Forest. Regional Park Service officials agreed that recreation fees should be collected at Saguaro National Monument, but stated that personnel ceilings prevented them from hiring the additional personnel that would be required to make the collections. In this instance, the Forest Service fee was questioned because another Government agency allowed visitors into a comparable recreation area without fee.

In instances such as that discussed above, we believe that since the Forest Service area is adjacent to the National Park Service area, and the Forest Service already has staff collecting recreation fees in the area, consideration should be given to the possibility of having Forest Service personnel do the collecting for both agencies. Implementation of this practice in this area and other areas, when practicable, would help remove the inequity questioned by the various visitors, increase collections, and perhaps, result in a more economical operation.

We wish to express our appreciation to you for the cooperation and assistance given by the Forest Service to members of our staff during the review

Sincerely yours,


Victor L. Lowe
Associate Director